

## Discussion Questions Facing the Mountain

1. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, shocked Americans of all creeds and ethnic backgrounds. Almost universally, Americans understood that America's entry into the war was now inevitable and that as a consequence their day-to-day lives were about to change in large but unpredictable ways.

How do you think Japanese Americans' experience of the attack might have differed from the rest of the American population? How might it have differed from the experience of German Americans and Italian Americans? In what ways do you think most Americans' reactions to the attack might have been similar or dissimilar to their reactions to the September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers in New York? In what way might Muslim Americans in particular have experienced the 9/11 attack and its aftermath differently from other Americans?

2. In Hawaii, Kats Miho grew up in a racially stratified society that severely limited opportunities for Asian immigrants and their American children. Hawaii's plantation system, in particular, allowed a few families to control the lives and livelihoods of many thousands of immigrants who worked in the cane fields. Similarly, the Shiosaki, Tokiwa, and Hirabayashi families faced systemic anti-Asian discrimination that prevented them from owning land, using certain public facilities, and fully participating in American life.

In what ways do immigrants from other parts of the world face similar obstacles in the United States today? To what extent do Asian immigrants and their descendants, in particular, still face prejudices and obstacles today?

3. When Kats Miho and the other Japanese American members of the Hawai'i Territorial Guard were told they could no longer serve in the unit, many of them were reduced to tears.

Why do you think they had such a strong emotional response to being removed from the unit? How do you think you might have reacted under similar circumstances?

4. One of the central themes of *Facing the Mountain* is the universal importance of home—the consequences of losing one’s home, the human need to create a sense of home wherever one must live, the drive to return home when far away from it.

In what specific ways do these concerns with home play out in the lives of the book’s four principal protagonists—Kats Miho, Fred Shiosaki, Rudy Tokiwa, and Gordon Hirabayashi? What role does home—the loss of it, the need to create it, the drive to return to it—play in the lives of each of them?

5. As is often the case with immigrants from various parts of the world, the attitudes and values of the first generation of Japanese immigrants to arrive in America often come in conflict with the attitudes and values of their American children.

How and where do these conflicts show up in *Facing the Mountain*? What roles do they play in shaping the events the story chronicles? Do the same dynamics play a role in your own family history or the family histories of your friends and acquaintances?

6. In a similar vein, the beliefs, traditions, and values of immigrants sometimes work their way into the mainstream of American thought and strengthen our institutions and manner of living in novel ways.

What traditional Japanese beliefs, values, or attitudes, if any, did Kats, Fred, Rudy, and Gordon carry into the war and into their lives that made them better soldiers and citizens?

7. The Japanese American families forced from their homes were only allowed to bring with them whatever they could carry to the buses that transported them to “assembly centers.” In most cases, this meant abandoning many of their most precious possessions as well as walking away from the source of their livelihoods.

Looking around your home, what would you have taken to camp with you? What would you have done with any family pets? With your car? With your family heirlooms? With your business interests? How would you have explained to your

children what was happening? What would you have done about any family members with special needs?

8. Many of the young Japanese American men who resisted the draft refused to serve so long as their parents and family members were incarcerated in the camps.

In your opinion, was this a reasonable stance to take?

9. During the war, within the Japanese American community, there was a great deal of controversy over those who refused to serve. In recent years the resisters have come to be seen in a much more positive light—even heroic—by many Japanese Americans, as well as by others who are concerned with matters of social and racial equity.

What do you think the legacy of the resisters is?

10. In a similar vein, the young men who joined the 442nd and the 100th were inarguably courageous as demonstrated by their extraordinary battle record throughout the war, the number of casualties they took, and the number of awards that were eventually conferred on them.

But does courage have other dimensions? What about the actions of someone like Gordon Hirabayashi? How does his courage in violating the curfew and refusing to be incarcerated in a camp stack up against the courage of the Nisei soldiers who served in Europe?

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